

BROWNE—*Ethnography of Inishbofin and Inishahark.* 349

but a few years ago the ordinary means of lighting the houses was a <sup>373</sup>  
rude open lamp, filled with oil extracted from the livers of fish, and  
having a piece of peeled rush for a wick.

Kelp-burning, was formerly one of the industries of the islands, <sup>381</sup>  
but of late years it declined rapidly, and is now practically extinct.  
As to the cause of this decay of a formerly profitable source of income,  
very different accounts are given, some alleging the poor quality of  
the weed; others that they were not fairly treated in selling; and  
others again that it does not pay as well as the fish-curing.

The fish most taken are sea-bream, glassan (a sort of pollock), <sup>226</sup>  
mackerel, turbot, and plaice, used mostly for home consumption; cod <sup>439</sup>  
and ling, which are cured at the fish-curing station for exportation,  
and oil extracted from their livers; also large quantities of crabs and  
lobsters, which are taken to Ballyvaughan, Co. Clare, from which they  
are forwarded to the English market. The boat used for conveying <sup>[501]</sup>  
them is of peculiar construction, and has a large salt-water tank  
amidships, in which the lobsters are kept alive. The lobster-pots are  
of the usual type. There is nothing unusual about their ordinary <sup>[502]</sup>  
method of fishing, except that the Inishbofin men, as mentioned in  
a footnote to the account of that island in the Memoir of the  
Geological Survey, already alluded to, do not follow the shoals of fish  
around the western headland, but carry their boats across the narrow  
isthmus in which Lough Bofin is situated.

The pursuit of the "sun-fish," or basking-shark (*Selache marina*), <sup>226</sup>  
was formerly a source of considerable profit to the islanders, but has  
been almost altogether abandoned of late years owing to the decline in  
the price of the oil, and partly, it is said, to the loss of several lives on  
one occasion when a boat was charged and overturned by a wounded  
fish, also to the partial disappearance for some years of the sharks.

The season for this enterprise is from April until the end of June,  
and in that time large numbers of these fish were taken formerly, and  
some are still killed from time to time. Mr. G. H. Kinahan, to whom  
I am indebted for several notes relative to the condition of the islands  
some years ago, says:—"The sun-fish fishing was considerable in my  
time (1870). I have seen strings of seven and nine fish; when caught,  
they towed them into the harbour, cut out the liver, and left the  
carcass to rot, or be eaten by the pigs; the stench in the harbour was  
something to remember." A very full description of the fishing is  
given by Sir H. W. Gore-Booth in a recent article. He states that  
the value of the oil (from eight to twelve petroleum barrels full)  
obtained from the liver of one of these fish has been variously estimated

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BROWNE—*Ethnography of the Mullet, Inishkea, & Portacloy*. 589

extreme north point of the peninsula. Off this part of the coast lies Eagle Island, high and rocky in coast and surface, and a lighthouse-station. From Frenchport (or rather Annagh Head, its southern boundary) southward, the coast is sandy beach, shingle, and low rocks, and is backed to a large extent by rolling ranges of sandhills. Off this part of the coast lie Iniskea and Duvillaun, having a sandy or rocky shore, and a surface of no great elevation. The eastern shore along Blacksod Bay and Broadhaven is sheltered and low. [502]

The surface of the Mullet does not reach any very great elevation, the highest point in the northern part being 410 feet above sea level, and the rounded granite hill of Tarmon, in the extreme south, 369 feet. It is much diversified, a good deal of it being fertile land, especially on the east side, but in the north part there is a good deal of bog and moor, and in the south and west rolling sandhills barely held in check by bent. In some of the narrower portions a fertile belt lies between two sandy ones. [134]

The district of Portacloy is a wild mountainous region, with a coast of precipitous cliffs of great height, and riddled with caves. Benwee Head, which rises above the sea to the height of 1000 feet, is just outside the mouth of the deep narrow inlet which forms the harbour. The surface of this part of the district is very wild, and consists largely of bog and mountain. The climate is very mild, frost and snow being of infrequent occurrence and not lasting for long, but the rains are heavy and almost constant during the greater part of the year, and storms are frequent and severe. [504]

Vegetation flourishes well, but, owing to the storms, trees are very few and only grow in sheltered localities. [137]

The whole district is largely cut off from the outer world by the wide stretch of wild and sparsely peopled country through which the mail road from Ballina runs. [491]

III.—ANTHROPOGRAPHY.

1. *Methods*.—The methods employed did not differ to any great extent from those made use of on the two previous occasions. A few [125]

<sup>1</sup> I am indebted to Mr. G. H. Kinahan, M.R.I.A., for the following note on the geology of the Mullet:—The south rough portion is granite, while the north rough portion is in part Archæan (query, the equivalent of the Sutherland Algonkian rocks that have been called Old Bay), and in part Archæan quartzite (query, the equivalents of the Scotch Torridon Sandstone); while the central portion is occupied by schists of an uncertain age that lie unconformably on the Archæan rock to the northward. [133]

OLD PISHROGUES

Old customs die hard in isolated islands and in the loneliness of ships at sea. Fishermen in the north to this day avoid direct mention of many words such as pig, priest and rat, and similar tabus are found among fishing communities as far away as Malaya, 'Formerly when starting on fishing expeditions the crews of Irish boats were very careful that their craft should leave the shore in a direction sunways, and even yet this superstition directs the course of many a fishing boat',<sup>1</sup> and, we may add, controls the casting of a net. A boat should always be entered on the right-hand side. In the kingdom of Mourne [192] 'it was unlucky to be the third boat out on leaving harbour, and men would go to any lengths to avoid it, even tying two boats together so that there should be no third boat. On a Monday morning a fisherman will laughingly refuse to give you a light for your pipe, for he would be giving away his luck for the week. There were lucky and unlucky people to whom to sell fish, and it was the custom not to sell all the catch but to leave some fish in the boat. When a present of fish was made, they were lifted backwards high over the head from the boat [431] and not given straightforwardly. Nor would the old fishermen clean their boats until the end of the season, or even wipe the fish-scales from their boots. An unlucky boat would try to steal the luck of another boat by rubbing alongside it.' The long-line fishermen of Carrickfergus would always spit on the first and last hook they baited, and in the mouth of the first fresh fish taken off the hook.<sup>2</sup> Superstitions attach also to fresh-water fish, especially to the sacred trout which, for the most part invisible, bring luck to pilgrims who catch a glimpse of them in certain holy wells. [312]

Innumerable pishrogues concern the domesticated animals, and in particular cows and their milk and butter, which are peculiarly liable to supernatural influences. In the face of these unseen forces it is important that a new season or a new venture, or any operation carried out for the first time, should be begun with care and due ceremony, for special danger is attached to these occasions. Thus the first rich milk given by a [234] [825]

<sup>1</sup>Wood-Martin, *Elder Faiths*, 2, 52.

<sup>2</sup>E. E. Evans, *Mourne Country*, 196.

<sup>3</sup>S. McSkimin, *The History and Antiquities of Carrickfergus*, 260.

18 • THE ISLAND AND ITS PAST

next to the new one. Built in 1899, the present chapel has a bell tower in its yard, and 500 feet from it on a trail leading north to the common land is a shrine made of cement depicting Christ crucified, which was constructed in 1950. A curate who lives in a rented house in Low Village looks after the spiritual needs of the people of Inis Beag and those living in Inis Thiar. He travels to and from the neighboring island by canoe, although occasionally he takes advantage of the ship servicing the islands when its schedule coincides with his own. The region has been served by a parish priest since late in the eighteenth century following the relaxation of the Penal Laws, but only in 1919 did a curate take up permanent residence in Inis Beag. Prior to that the island was visited by clerics from the parish church and sometimes from the mainland. 346  
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It is not known when the first elementary school was established in Inis Beag, but the islanders claim that at least some formal education was provided from the early nineteenth century on, first by landlords and then by the government. Today, a "national school" with seven grades, or "standards," built in 1943, stands on a terrace above the east end of the strand. Its 90 pupils are taught by three instructors, two of whom are local girls and the third, the "headmaster," an outsider. The base of the school building and the low walls surrounding it are banked with accumulating sand, which has created much resentment against the government for having put up the structure there rather than in a more protected location, as advised by the folk. The former school, located next to the watch tower on the promontory above Castle Village, was sold to an islander after it was abandoned, and he partially razed it to obtain valuable building materials. 871  
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Three keepers are maintained in Inis Beag by the Irish Lights Service. One or two men and their families made up the lighthouse personnel until 1929, when a severe storm greatly damaged the installation and caused the women and children to be ordered off the island for their safety. The keepers are rotated, with two men on duty while a third vacations for two weeks, and from time to time islanders serve as relief and maintenance workers and help unload supply ships. A symbiotic relationship exists between the folk and the keepers, wherein the former are employed in the above and other capacities by the service, and the latter dispense kerosene and other equipment, it is alleged, to pay for goods and services provided them, such as craft objects which are sold on the mainland for personal profit. The keepers attend church, utilize the shops, and occasionally pay visits to local households, and these visits are reciprocated by a few men and children. 502 •  
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Trails, wells, springs, land areas, and coastal features also figure prominently in the lives of the islanders. Place-names have been attached to each, most of which were created prior to this generation, although fields in certain land areas still are being named as they are manufactured. It is thought that many of the place-names refer to archaic events, persons, and geographical conditions, and legends have come to surround some of them. Others are meaningless in that their constituent words no longer are understood because of either sound shifts or sheer cultural loss. The derivation of place-names is a common topic of conversation, and often prolonged and heated arguments arise over, for instance, the identity of the man after whom a crag is named or the time at which buildings disappeared 823

226 many of them have lost their lives to the ocean. Islanders are well aware of the  
 181 wide differences in rowing and fishing abilities among themselves, and the evaluation  
 of the skills of various men, past and present, is a much heard subject of  
 144 conversation. Also, many men choose not to fish because they are unable to develop  
 the requisite talents, are prone to severe seasickness, or are overly wary of the  
 524 dangers associated with fishing. It seems reasonable to assume that people who  
 spend so much time on the water as a matter of safety will have learned to swim,  
 831 but I was unable to discover a single islander who possesses this skill. The reasons  
 524 put forward to account for the fact are several, but the most significant one never  
 is broached—the puritanical reluctance to bare the body either publicly or pri-  
 539 vately at any age. Folk rationalizations are best summed up in the following quo-  
 524 tations: "Nothing will happen to the man who knows the sea.", "Better for a man  
 to drown at once and save himself the suffering.", "The man who can't swim will  
 take more care.", and "When death is on a man, he can't be saved."

226 A recurring motif in writings about Inis Beag is the threatening sea and  
 165 heavy loss of life among fishermen, with its attendant psychological depression. In  
 161 the past century, only four sea accidents have occurred in the island with the loss  
 821 of but 12 lives. The folk are extremely cautious out of respect for the elements,  
 402 handle their canoes with remarkable dexterity, and are excellent weather fore-  
 524 casters. The claim of one famous writer that each family has lost male members  
 to the ocean reflects not only his psychological outlook, but the breadth and depth  
 of kinship reckoning and the high degree of inbreeding—as an islander told me,  
 "Every Inis Beag family is related, and the drowned man might have been eight-  
 121 of-kin (third cousin) who died 60 years ago." The motif can be attributed to the  
 projection of a tragic world view into the interpretation of the local culture by  
 some authors, to the nativistic and primitivistic biases of other writers, and to a  
 common sense conclusion reached by observers who have spent little time in the  
 island and have failed to "count noses."

## Diet

262 The diet of the islanders is simple, and only one large meal is eaten during  
 264 the day. After the turf fire is rekindled from coals and water is boiled for tea, the  
 252 family assembles for a breakfast which includes bread spread with butter and jam  
 212 and tea mixed with ample amounts of milk and sugar. Dinner at noon and lunches  
 372 in the late afternoon and before retiring at night feature the same ingredients,  
 although a boiled or fried egg usually is added to the dinner menu. The supper,  
 eaten between seven and eight o'clock in the summer and an hour or two earlier  
 during the winter, is the main meal when the family once again is united, and at  
 this time boiled potatoes and vegetables, and meat if available, dominate the menu.  
 561 Again bread and tea are served, and a dessert, or "sweet"—such as custard, rhubarb,  
 blancmange, or biscuits—may be added. Children of school age in a family eat  
 together at noon and after school and may be joined by their father, but his duties  
 often absent him from one or both of these meals, and he may carry bread and tea

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[513] underclothing retained. The latter practice reflects extreme modesty as well as  
[515] the need for warmth. Islanders have an obsessive fear of nakedness which permits  
them, after infancy, to bathe only their feet, hands, and face and precludes bathing  
in the sea and the use of bathtubs.

### Crafts

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434 Of the several crafts practiced in Inis Beag, only three are strictly income  
[501] instead of combined subsistence-income activities: the manufacture of *curach* by  
[293] four men, the mass production of stockings by four girls in the factory at the  
coast guard station, and the fashioning of miniature canoes by a single man.  
[294] Sweaters, woven belts, cowhide shoes, and the small multi-colored shawls are  
[328] made both for local wear and for export. Most of the exported sweaters are sold  
[297] to a particular mainland firm for resale, as are all of the model canoes, and the  
[437] factory is sponsored by Gaeltacht Eireann which markets the stockings produced.  
Other craft commodities are sold by the folk directly to consumers, most of whom  
are tourists.

501 The long rowing canoe of Inis Beag is distributed widely along the west  
[171] coast of Ireland, from Cos. Donegal to Kerry, and its seaworthy qualities as well as  
[174] the rowing skill of the crews which sail it are renowned. One of a number of  
[178] varieties of the coracle, which has a heritage extending back to the Mesolithic, it  
is built of deal and oak lathes and covered with tarred canvas (see Fig 10). Before  
canvas was introduced, untanned seal, cow, and horse hides were used for covering,  
and these were reported from a nearby island less than 100 years ago. The *curach*  
is approximately 20 feet in length, has a high pointed nose, is round bellied and  
lacks a keel, draws less than 6 inches of water, and is rowed with narrow 10-foot-  
long oars. These oars are bladeless for use in rough seas and are pivoted on single  
● 502 tholepins rather than in oarlocks. The looms of the oars overlap, so that oarsmen  
must pull cross-handed, and on long journeys a lug sail is hoisted to relieve the  
crew. For the neophyte, rowing a *curach* cross-handed in a heavy sea can be even  
more abusive of the hands than rebuilding a gateway in a stone fence. Most  
canoes hold three men—are "three-oared"—but two-, four-, and even five-men  
*curach* were or are used. Loads up to a ton and a half can be accommodated, and  
trussed asses, sheep, and horses sometimes are transported in them.

501 Forty-two householders in Inis Beag own three-men canoes, among whom  
[502] three have additional two-oared *curach*. The craft are stored upside down in "cots"  
on either side of the strand along the margins of the common land, although  
Terrace villagers use a small beach along the northeast coast of the island; they  
are carried between the cots and the water upside down on the shoulders of the  
crew, and in that position resemble gigantic beetles. Two Inis Beag men are at  
[433] work building canoes most of the time, and when they are not busy at this task they  
[322] construct furniture for local sale. Two other men manufacture *curach* occasionally,  
[184] and another two who once built them have discontinued the practice. No canoe  
makers are found elsewhere in the region; therefore, Inis Beag artisans serve the

48 • THE LAND AND THE SEA

ported on the sea only by thin canvas. Most men are able to make pampooties for themselves, but several islanders specialize in the craft and sell their wares to their fellows and to visitors. Usually cured hides are imported from the mainland, and 40 pairs of pampooties can be fashioned from a whole cowhide. They are cut to shape the foot, have the hair outside, are secured front and back by lacing, and when used daily will last about two months. To be pliable, they must be kept moist, so they are dipped in water when they become dry and hardened; however, because they are worn constantly in wet grass and sand, they seldom lose their softness.

In this chapter, I have considered all of the important means of gaining a livelihood in Inis Beag. Some I have discussed at length, while others I have touched on briefly and will reconsider later; but two thus far not referred to—piloting and recovering objects washed ashore—I would like to take up before ending the chapter. Only one pilot remains in the island, but early in the century men of several families guided vessels through the east sound to ports on the mainland. Then it was customary to place lookouts at the high points of Inis Beag to scan the horizon for masts of approaching ships, and often several canoes would race miles out to sea in order to be first to contact a potential customer. The Terrace villager who still plies the trade seldom contacts likely vessels now, and more often than not his services are refused once he rows to a ship, what with modern charts and navigating instruments. Piloting is still very much alive in the memories of the folk, and one of the popular genres of folklore is the humorous anecdote dealing with real and imagined experiences of pilots. One of these concerns a crew fishing in the east sound which was hailed by the captain of a passing schooner. Although not a pilot, an old member of the crew claimed that he was and climbed aboard, and the captain agreed to hire him after he said that he knew the sound and coastline well. Soon after, the ship struck bottom "with a great bump," and the enraged captain shouted, "I thought you said you knew all the rocks in the sound.", to which the islandman replied in a quiet voice, "I did, and that's one of them." The same old man in another tale earns the job by boxing the compass in Gaelic for the captain; the humor of this story lies in the fact that the captain does not know Irish, and the islandman, who in turn does not know the points of the compass, simply recites terms of reference<sup>2</sup> for kin in a rhythmic manner.

One of the oldest of Inis Beag traditions is the "law of wrack"—the right of islanders to confiscate objects of value which have washed ashore. If a person discovers wrack, he establishes ownership by placing a stone atop it or by carrying it above high water mark, and no one else will claim it. Some islanders wander along the shores at dawn seeking what objects may have washed in during the night, especially timber, and those who habitually engage in this pursuit are known disparagingly as "wrack-boomers"—so poor that they must depend on salvage. During the two world wars, the economy of Inis Beag was bolstered by the immense amount of wreckage which drifted in from torpedoed ships, and the islanders still reminisce about particular visitations of flour, planks, and other

<sup>2</sup> See p. 75 for a definition of terms of reference.

JOHN C. MESSENGER

[133] which contain a large portion of the natural flora—herbs and shrubs—  
[137] of the island. Stone fences delimit many hundreds of plots which com-  
[361] pose most of the two-square-mile land surface of Inis Beag.  
[417]

[105] The island boasts a post office with radio-telephone facilities, a  
[205] "national school" in which three teachers instruct ninety pupils in the  
[206] seven "standards," two provision shops with attached "pubs," a former  
[871] coast guard station now housing the nurse and a knitting industry which  
[759] employs local girls, a lighthouse, and a chapel served by a curate who  
[288] resides nearby. Inis Beag lacks electricity and running water, and the  
[464] only vehicles are several ass-drawn carts which are able to travel the  
[502] narrow, fence-bordered trails. A small "steamer" carrying supplies,  
[793] passengers, and mail to and from a mainland port visits the island  
[177] at least once each week. That Inis Beag has experienced far less  
[178] cultural change than other island communities of Ireland is largely due  
[505] to the fact that, in absence of a deep water quay, the steamer has  
[131] had to stand off the strand and be met by "canoes." Most of the  
[484] tourists who come to the island stay only for the hours that the steamer  
is anchored and go ashore mainly for the thrill of riding in the canoes,  
which the island men row with consummate skill. Insofar as I can dis-  
cover, the inhabitants of Inis Beag are less prone to visit the mainland  
than are the peoples of other Irish islands.

## INIS BEAG HISTORY AND CULTURE<sup>2</sup>

[17] The prehistory and history of Inis Beag are recorded dramatically in  
[211] a multitude of monuments and artifacts of stone and metal, including  
Neolithic axe-heads and kitchen middens, Copper-Bronze Age gallery  
grave tombs and burial mounds of earth and stone, an Iron Age prom-  
ontory fort, and medieval Christian monasteries, churches, cemeteries,  
stone houses, and a sacred well, as well as a three-story tower house  
built by the political overlords of the island. Irish nativists claim that  
the contemporary folk are lineal descendants of ancient, once civilized

[101] <sup>2</sup> The culture described herein is that of 1959-1960 and excludes important  
[121] changes which have occurred since then, such as those resulting from the intro-  
duction of television, a summer language school for pupils from the mainland,  
and free secondary education.